

Filipino Students' Standpoint on Going Back to Traditional Schooling in the New Normal

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ABSTRACT

Schools worldwide have started opening doors to welcome back students who, for almost two years, have been stuck studying at home. This study looks at the standpoint of Filipino students on going back to regular face-to-face schooling. There were 2,274 students of different tiers of education (high school, collegiate, graduate) from different major island groups of the Philippines (Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao) who participated in the study. The study used a mixed-method of descriptive statistics to present the quantitative data gathered and thematic analysis of qualitative responses from the subjects. The majority of all the respondents favored going back to the physical classroom, and little only favored staying using the distance mode. In the qualitative analysis, the recurring reasons of the students varied from personal, economic, and fear of getting the virus. It was concluded that Filipino students want to go back to schooling. Moreover, a sizeable amount preferred hybrid while a small number preferred to stay in online or distance mode. Educational institutions should always observe the covid 19 protocol when students go back.

Keywords: Blended learning, Covid-19, Distance learning, Hybrid learning, Online learning, Post-covid, Traditional schooling.

Journal of Teacher Education and Research (2022). DOI: 10.36268/JTER/17104

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus has brought a huge change in how the world operates; it poses a serious public health threat worldwide. Borders closed, economies shut down, people were forced to stay at home, and schools shut their doors to learners. According to the World Health Organization, as of the 21st of February 2022, there are 418,650,474 cumulative confirmed Covid19 cases worldwide and 5,856,224 cumulative deaths recorded. In the Philippines, a whooping 3.6 million confirmed cases and 55,330 deaths were recorded since the pandemic's onset.

As the virus continuously mutates in different variants with diverse levels of effects on human health, people have started accepting and living with it. Many countries have opened and fully ceased all their restrictions (Dey, 2022); some are still cautious due to the fact that they are afraid to have another surge that their healthcare system could not cope with. Furthermore, the school system was one of the heavily affected by the virus closing its doors to all learners globally. And now, after more than two years of shutdown, schools gradually welcome students with their different health protocols to accommodate returning students.

Hence, this study aims to know the perspective of Filipino students from the three major island groups of the Philippines about going back to normal schooling after two years of doing online/distance learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Israel, schools were forced to close after more than two thousand students tested positive for the virus, and more than 28,000 students and school personnel were placed under quarantine (Estrin, 2020) after reopening the classes. Israel was known to be one of the few countries that got herd immunity to the virus. In India's

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How to cite this article: Nunez, J.L., Barnachea, A.L., Gula, L.P., Jabagat, J.B., Urbano, J.M. (2022). Filipino Students' Standpoint on Going Back to Traditional Schooling in the New Normal. *Journal of Teacher Education and Research*, 17(1):16-21.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

state of Andhra Pradesh, when schools reopened in November of 2020, despite following the covid 19 protocol, a high number of students and teachers tested positive for the virus (Baskaran, Raghav, and Saurabh, 2020). In the United States, a study found out that schools reopening in the late 2020 and early 2021 added to the rapid increase of confirmed cases and deaths in the county (Chernozhukov, Kasahara, & Schrimpf, 2021). According to Hyde (2021), this increase can be attributed to easing restrictions on protocols and parents returning to workplaces – hence mingling at their respective homes.

On the other hand, Ethiopia partly recovered from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in early November 2020, and social activities gradually resumed. Following authorization from the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, Ethiopia's higher education system was set to resume after an eight-month lockdown, with an adaptation to the culture of the "new normal" preventative response to COVID-19 in mind. "However, 'new normal' is not normal," is a word coined during the COVID-19 pandemic in the adaptation phase (Cristobal et al., 2021).

A study in Thailand found out that most students stated that this 'forced' online learning situation did not improve learning



quality or provide sufficient access to education. Even though the majority of students did not believe their professors could effectively organize the courses, they were happy with the relevant comments and support they received from them. Furthermore, while most students stated that they had the ability to learn online and that they found online learning to be simple, they did have some technical difficulties while doing so. More so, students preferred face-to-face courses over online classrooms, believing that face-to-face classrooms were more comfortable. They also stated that they would not be willing to learn online in the future (lmsa-ard, 2020).

Meanwhile, in a study done in Southeast Nigeria, the majority or 56.7% of mothers (respondents) preferred their children to back to school. However, few would not allow their children due to distrust in schools' systems in handling covid-19 preventive measures (Aronu, Chinawa, Nduagubam, Ndudi, & Josephat, 2020).

The existence of PEL lends a tinge to the educational part of Indonesia's coverage in general. This learning environment has numerous beneficial and dire consequences in terms of technical implementation, mental health, and learning outcomes. The Indonesian government had a discussion for schools to offer required choices for the adoption of LFtFL (limited face-to-face learning) by considering diverse perspectives of PEL, as detailed in the research context. As a result, the learning shift becomes news, eliciting a range of reactions, particularly among students (Soesanto and Dirgantoro, 2021).

Furthermore, a study conducted to college students in the United States mentions that the respondents were somewhat prepared for online learning. However, it did not seem to impact their overall learning (Hussain, Chau, Bang, Meyer, and Islam, 2021). Another study conducted by Higher Ed and College Pulse, both in the United States, mentions that of all the college participants who went back to face-to-face learning, 43% of which were at least "somewhat satisfied" to extend to which they could see their friends. And 38% of all the respondents were "dissatisfied." In terms of faculty or teaching connection, only 40% of the participants say that they were "somewhat satisfied," and 34% felt "somewhat dissatisfied". Overall, it mentions that the satisfaction responses are greater in non-profit colleges (50%) than in public institutions, which is only 39% (Ezarik, 2021).

In the Philippines, to prevent further effects of the pandemic, the majority of schools have remained closed until now. So much so that on the onset of the pandemic, many institutions in the Philippines turned to fully online and e-learning because they have the ability to do so. E-learning is a method of teaching and learning that uses electronic media and devices as instruments for expanding access to training, communication, and engagement, as well as easing the adoption of new ways of understanding and developing learning – this can be both synchronous, asynchronous, or mobile (Sangrà, Vlachopoulos, and Cabrera, 2012).

Moreover, in one study done by the university of the Philippines to analyze the readiness of Filipino students to adopt the type of learning, results show that it is multidimensional, meaning in terms of technological efficacy, students are ready; however in terms of learner-control it says otherwise (Reyes, Grajo, Comia, Talento, Ebal, and Mendonza, 2021). The authors elaborated that the students are not confident enough about their independence and control in their learning process because of distractions like social media, house chores, family duties, and livelihood responsibilities. Respondents on the study said that these distractors could take away their focus on online or distance learning.

Consequently, the massive public-school system of the Philippines and its learners could not cope with this type of learning, resulting in offline distance learning or modular type of lesson delivery in most of its schools (Cuisia-Villanueva & Núñez, 2021). During the modular type of learning, teachers in remote areas deliver and collect the modules to learners' homes, while those in the big cities schedule parents' visits to pick up and drop off modules during class days. The situation is still true at present to some schools that were not selected to run the limited face-to-face scheme due to the considerable risk of the virus.

The situation of both public and private education has remained in distance mode until now. According to the Department of Education, the enrollment in the Philippines at all levels has reached 27,232,095 for the school year 2021-22, and it was 3.83% higher compared to enrollment in the previous year. In the event that the regular schooling goes back to normal, it is expected to have more than 27 million students of all levels would be flocking into a multitude of locations in the archipelago, raising the threat of another surge of the new variant of the virus (Department of Education, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Study Setting, Population, and Limitation

A two-month internet-based cross-sectional survey was utilized from the 27th of December 2021 to 28th of February 2022, when schools in the Philippines have started the implementation of limited face-to-face classes. Researchers used the convenience of snowball sampling to gather data using linkage and networks of schools, universities, families, and friends (Marzo, Singh, & Mukti, 2021; Naderifar, Goli, and Ghajaei, 2017). Overall, 2,274 students took part in the snowball survey. However, the sample does not represent the entire population of the entire country.

The respondents came from three major island groups of the Philippines, namely: Luzon (north), Visayas (central), and Mindanao (south). The country is made up of more than 7,600 islands in the southeast Asian continent in the Pacific region. The groups were limited to those of high school (both junior and senior), college/university, and (post) graduate students currently enrolled in the school year 2021-2022 and residing in the Philippines. The grouping of the respondents was to diversify among infrastructural circumstances, the topography of different islands, and covid-19 protocols.

Using Google Forms to float the questionnaire, a structured close-ended set of questions plus three optional open-ended questions were drafted and sent through Facebook Messenger and other social media sites through snowballing technique.

Data Gathering and Processing

Due to the nature of the study, the researchers opted to do descriptive statistics to analyze the numerical data. Descriptive statistics describe the connection between variables in a sample or population to summarize data in an ordered manner. Descriptive statistics contain measures of frequency, central tendency, dispersion/variation, location, and several types of variables: nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio (Kaur, Stoltzfus, & Yellapu, 2018).

With three open-ended questions in the form, the researchers also used thematic analysis (Javadi & Zarea, 2016) for the qualitative data gathered on the opinion of Filipino students to go back to normal brick-and-mortar schooling. Researchers in the social sciences developed qualitative research methods to investigate

social and cultural phenomena. Popularly, action research, case study research, ethnographic studies, phenomenological, and autoethnography are some examples of qualitative methods (Myers, 2020). Thematic analysis is a versatile method of qualitative analysis that permits researchers to create new understandings and notions derived from data. In the analysis, researchers thoroughly inspect the data to identify common themes like topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repetitively (Caulfield, 2022).

RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis

According to the data gathered, there were 2,274 students of various levels from the three major island groups in the country.

In Figure 1, Luzon, which has 37.42% or 851 of the population size. It tallied 58.99% or 502 high school students and 36.66% or 312 college students. While 4.35% or 37 are in the graduate level of studies.

The Visayas has the 27.04% or 615 of the total population. It gathered 66.50% or 409 high school students, 31.06% or 191 college students, and 2.44% or 15 graduate students.

Lastly, in the south, Mindanao got 35.53%, or 808 of the total respondents, with 8.79% or 71 are high school, 88.61% or 716 being college, and 2.6% or 21 are graduate students.

The Figure 2 shows that of all the 2,274 participants, 37.42% or 851 respondents were from Luzon. At the same time, Mindanao has the second-largest distribution of 35.53% or 808 responses. And the Visayas is comprised of 27.04% or 615.

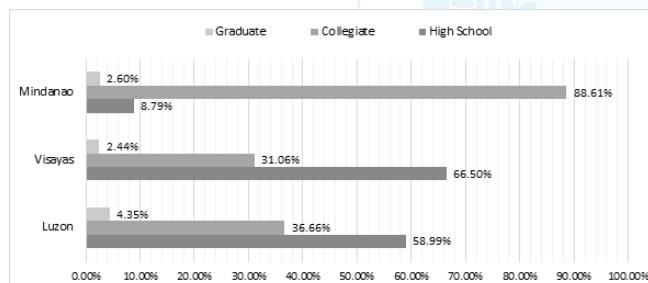


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents per Education Level in Different Island Groups

Of all Luzon participants, 51.12% or 435 wanted to go back to normal face-to-face schooling. And 35.49% or 302 respondents preferred the hybrid set-up. While 13.40% or 114 of all who participated chose to keep online or distance class.

In Visayas, 50.73% or 312 participants expressed their eagerness to go back to regular schooling, while 38.54% or 237 chose the hybrid mode. And only 10.73% or 66 people preferred the online or distance mode.

With the Mindanao respondents, a whopping 60.52% or 489 students expressed their want to get back to physical schooling, and 29.21% or 236 students favored the hybrid mode. And only 10.27% or 83 responded to stay at online distance mode of education.

The over all population of the sample size is comprised of 2,274 participants that of all the 2,274 participants, 43.18% or 982 were high school students, and 53.61% or 1,219 were college/university students. While only 3.21% or 73 were graduate students.

In Figure 3, among the high school students, 53.05% or 521 responded that they want to go back to regular schooling. 34.42%

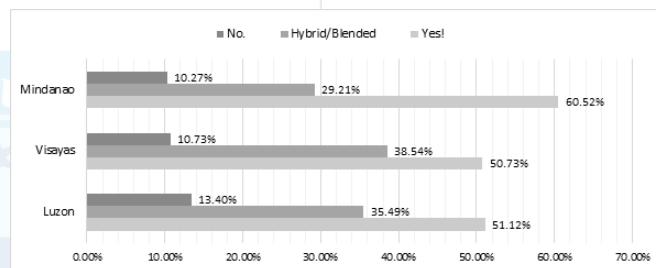


Figure 2: Reponses per Island Group

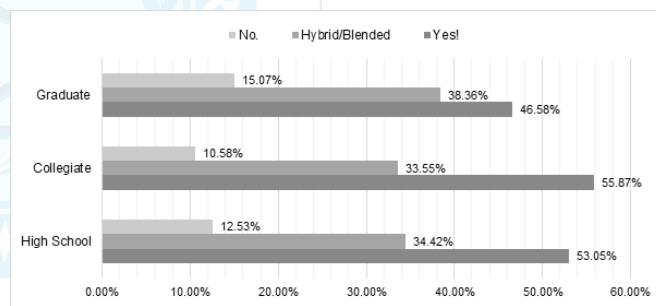


Figure 3: Reponses per Education Level

Table 1: Summary of themes for Q3.a.

Themes	Sample Responses (Translated to English)
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I miss my friends.” “F2F classes help me express better during class discussion.” “I want to do internship in person. Doing it online feels like useless to me.” “There is too much distraction in my house.” “I want to socialize with other people.” “I have completed all the required shots of my vaccine. I am ready!” “I don’t want virtual graduation.” “I learn better in person with my teacher, especially if the topic is difficult to understand.” “I can’t learn so much in online classes. Extremely limited.” “... because I need hands-on and laboratory experience on my studies.” “It is easier to ask my teacher if I have questions, than doing modules I am only looking into papers.” “It is difficult to study without the presence of teacher.” “In online class, we just do copy-paste and Google the lesson. It is better if coming from teachers.”
Better understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Our house is not conducive for online learning or module because we are poor.” “Learning online is more expensive for me because I need to recharge my phone all the time.” “Internet is terribly slow. Signal is not strong.” “We only share one laptop with my siblings.”
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I miss my friends.” “F2F classes help me express better during class discussion.” “I want to do internship in person. Doing it online feels like useless to me.” “There is too much distraction in my house.” “I want to socialize with other people.” “I have completed all the required shots of my vaccine. I am ready!” “I don’t want virtual graduation.” “I learn better in person with my teacher, especially if the topic is difficult to understand.” “I can’t learn so much in online classes. Extremely limited.” “... because I need hands-on and laboratory experience on my studies.” “It is easier to ask my teacher if I have questions, than doing modules I am only looking into papers.” “It is difficult to study without the presence of teacher.” “In online class, we just do copy-paste and Google the lesson. It is better if coming from teachers.”



Table 2: Summary of themes for Q3.c.

Themes	Sample Responses(Translated to English)
Fear of the virus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am scared to get the virus even if I am fully vaccinated." • "My parents won't allow me." • "New variants just kept coming." • "I couldn't get vaccine because of my health condition." • "I am not prepared to back to school. It is more comfortable studying at home." • "I like online because I can take breaks anytime and no need to wear school uniform."
Convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I like it because back in school, I got bullied a lot. Online learning gave me a chance to heal and stay with my mom all the time. Bullying brought me a lot of problems." • "I am not ready, and I am a shy person." • "I don't need to wake up early." • "I was able to work and study at the same time and take care of my daughter. I am a single parent."
Family responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I take care of my livestock and small farm. If face-to-face class, it would be difficult for me to manage them because I will be at school all the time." • "I prefer this because I can take care of my sick mother while my father works for our family." • "I live far from school. It saves me money and time for travelling."
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It is great because I don't need to pay for dormitory or boarding house just to attend school." • "It is cheaper to study online because I live in an island far from my university." • "I have two brothers in college and one sister in high school. It is expensive if all of us are in face-to-face classes."

or 338 students of the group preferred the hybrid type of class. Meanwhile, 12.53% or 123 of the high schoolers wanted to stay in online or distance mode of learning.

In Figure 3, the collegiate group, 55.87% or 681 of all students favored of going back to brick-and-mortar school, while those who preferred the hybrid class is 33.55% or 409. On the other hand, those who were eager to continue in the current mode of learning only got 10.58% or 129 of all college respondents.

Moreover, 46.54% or 34 graduate students still preferred the traditional schooling, while 38.36% or 28 of them wanted the hybrid. While those who chose online mode got 15.07% or 11 respondents.

Qualitative Analysis

Among those respondents who answered the optional qualitative questionnaire. Here are the top recurring themes that emerged from the recorded responses.

To those who prefer the hybrid or mix of online and face-to-face (Q3.b.), the most recurring responses among them are the flexibility of hybrid classes given to the learners. Moreover, the recurring responses could be categorized into family responsibilities, weather situations, and personal choices. Here are the sample responses translated to English.

"I am taking care of my grandmother; it would be better if we have option to go to class or study from home if needed."

"I am a single parent; I want to be able to focus on taking care of my kid and at the same time have an option to visit the school if necessary. The pandemic has opened a new opportunity for me to finish school that I thought would never happen."

"I prefer hybrid because sometimes the weather here is awfully bad that I could not attend class and I will be absent. If hybrid, I will not miss anything."

"The flexibility of hybrid classes will give me freedom to choose whether to attend physical class or stay in the virtual world."

"I live in outskirts of the city, but I still want to go to school to be able to do some classwork, but hybrid would be a lot better for me."

"I am still afraid the virus, but I want to go to school at the same time. So, I prefer if only lecture classes it can be done online, but if we need laboratory or hands-on activity, we can visit the school."

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study is to know the perspective of Filipino students from the three major island groups of the Philippines about going back to normal schooling after two years doing online/distance learning. The researchers employed mixed methods of descriptive statistics to present the quantitative and qualitative data gathered wherein most of the respondents across education levels preferred going back to traditional schooling.

The majority of the responses of the three (Figure 3) preferred going back to normal classes wherein 55.87% of the respondents across the three island groups were coming from college/university students, followed by the high school students with 53.05% of the respondents and 46.58% of the respondents came from graduate students. There were 54.4% or 1,236 combined students across islands who expressed their eagerness to get back to physical schooling. Those who intended to continue but, in a hybrid, learning set-up got 34.1% or 775 respondents. And there are only 11.6% or 263 respondents answered "No".

In Tables 1 and 2, the researchers identified the recurring themes in every question on the survey regarding their sentiments and opinions regarding going back to normal classes. These questions are designed to be answered on an optional basis using open-ended statements.

The following themes were identified in the in the Q3.a. (Table 1) regarding their firsthand experiences, seeking a better understanding of the lessons with guidance from the teacher, and infrastructure-related concerns. In Table 2 (Q3.c.), the following themes are related to their fear of getting the virus, finding a convenient set-up of an established learning environment, the joint family responsibilities, and socio-economic concerns. While those who preferred the hybrid lessons see the flexibility of the mode to have options to go online or visit the school in different circumstances like weather conditions, family responsibilities, and the need for hands-on activity.

The data presented with the use of quantitative analysis shows that the number of the respondents reveals the majority sentiments and desire of the students to get back into a normal class as soon as possible. With the employment of qualitative analysis, the highlighted themes appear even clearer and stronger on the reasons, causes, and effects of distance/online learning in the usual routine of the learning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After seeing the findings, the researchers recommend that students who are eager to go back to school should strictly follow the covid-19 protocol being implemented in their respective schools.

Though the majority of the respondents prefer full traditional schooling, national government protocols and the Department of Education do not permit the full swing of the mode. Schools shall find strategies to accommodate the limited number of learners inside the classroom. Students who prefer the hybrid mode shall be given a study plan that would benefit both the school and the learners.

Furthermore, this study can be used as an anchor by educational planners, administrators, teachers, and researchers to craft a plan that would to the diverse needs of the students, especially in the new normal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank all students, teachers, schools, and universities participating in this nationwide survey research. This would not have been possible without your support.

FUNDING AND INTEREST

The survey did not receive any funding from any private individual or government organization. The research is merely done to know the standpoint of students on going back to traditional schooling. No conflict of interest has arisen between the authors and respondents.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questions (Google Form)

1. I live in
 - a. Luzon
 - b. Visayas
 - c. Mindanao

2. I am a
 - a. High school student
 - b. College/University student
 - c. Graduate Student

3. After two years of studying at a distance, do you want to go back to regular schooling?
 - a. Yes, I want to.
 - b. Yes, but I want a hybrid where I have an option to attend face-to-face or do it at a distance.
 - c. No, studying online/distance is suitable for me.

4. OPTIONAL: If you answered yes. Why?
5. OPTIONAL: If you answered hybrid. Why?
6. OPTIONAL: If you answered no. Why?

